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ABSTRACT

The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) has designated the week of September 17-21, 2001, as "Back to School Week." During this week, state legislators from throughout the country are encouraged by NCSL to contact principals and teachers in their respective districts and arrange for classroom visits to help students understand the pressures, conflicts, and difficulties that legislators deal with in trying to solve public problems. This booklet contains lesson plans for teachers and state legislators to use in middle school classrooms during that week. Using outside resource persons to co-teach lessons with classroom teachers in an interactive format has been recognized by many in the field of law-related and civic education as "best practice." Eight lessons are divided into three sections. The first one, "Lessons To Precede Legislator Visit, contains (1) "Getting To Know You: Student/Legislator Inventory"; (2) "Do You Trust Our Government?"; (3) "The Mindwalk"; (4) "What Is Public Policy?"; and (5) "A Day in the Life." The second one, "Lessons During Legislator Visit, contains (6) "A Day in the Life"; (7) "Public Hearing Simulation: How Should Our Guest Legislator Decide?"; and (8) "The Legislative In-Basket"). The third one, "Lessons After Legislator Visit, contains (9) "Debriefing the Visit: A Legislator Resume." (BT)

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Trust for Representative Democracy

America's Legislators Back to School Week--Middle School Lesson Plans.

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Trust for Representative Democracy

American's Legislators Back to School Week – Middle School Lesson Plans

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Introduction

Although many teachers understand the importance of teaching about state and local government-- the levels of government that most impacts the lives of our students-- few teaching resources are available. Government classes at the middle school level tend to emphasize the importance of students acquiring a depth of knowledge about our founding documents and the workings of our national government. Little attention has been given to state and local government-- the very levels at which citizens' voices are probably most effective and the levels of government that affect our lives the most.

The National Standards for Civics and Government address the need for students to study the importance of state governments. "Few Americans can identify most of the key people elected to serve them. It is important not only to know who these people are, but what their responsibilities are, and how they can be contacted on matters of interest. Such knowledge is an essential first step in providing Americans with the capacity to take part in their own governance. "*

The National Conference of State Legislatures has designated the week of September 17-21, 2001 as "Back to School Week" During this week, state legislators from throughout the country are encouraged by NCSL to contact principals and teachers in their respective districts and arrange for classroom visits to help students understand the pressures, conflicts, and difficulties that legislators deal with in trying to solve public problems.

The following includes suggested lesson plans for teachers and state legislators to use during America's Legislators Back to School Week. Making use of outside resource persons to co-teach lessons with classroom teachers in an interactive format has been recognized by many in the field of civic and law-related education as "best practice." Many of these lessons can be completed in one class period. The lessons are divided into three sections: activities to be completed before the legislator visit; lessons to be used collaboratively between the teacher and guest legislator on the day of the classroom visit; and a debriefing lesson and an assessment in which students reflect upon new insights they have gained by interacting with a guest legislator in their classroom.

* National Standards for Civics and Government, Calabasas, CA: Center for Civic Education, 1994, p. 65.

Lessons to Precede Legislator Visit:

1. Getting to Know You: Student/Legislator Inventory
2. Do You Trust Our Government?
3. The Mindwalk
4. What Is Public Policy?

5. A Day in the Life

During Legislator Visit Lessons:

6. (in class debriefing) A Day in the Life

7. Public Hearing Simulation: How Should Our Guest Legislator Decide?

8. The Legislative In-Basket

Post Legislator Visit Lessons:

9. Debriefing the Visit: A Legislator Resume

Teachers are also encouraged to adapt these lessons and to access the web site of their state legislature. Information about specific legislators and profiles of the districts that they represent can be found at http://www. ncsl.org/public/sitesleg.htm

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Lesson Plan I - Getting to Know You: Student/Legislator Inventory

Introduction:

Before a scheduled visited by a state legislator representing the students' community is scheduled, both the legislator and class need to exchange relevant information. In this introductory lesson, students use background information provided by the state legislator to compare perspectives on issues and to create a special illustration of that legislator's "briefcase."

Objective:

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to:

- identify issues of interest they wish to communicate to their legislator;
- synthesize information about their legislator to develop a visual product;

Materials:

- Information Forms: (1) Background information about the legislator for the class prior to the visit; and (2) Background information for the legislator provided by the instructor prior to the visit.
- Poster paper, markers

Teaching Time:

Note: It is recommended that teachers send the information form, Background Information About the Legislator, to the visiting legislator about two weeks before the scheduled visit. Teachers should request that this information sheet be returned several days before the scheduled visit. Teachers will also need to fill out the form, Background Information for the Legislator, and mail to the guest legislator in advance of the classroom visit.

Procedure:

1. Once the state legislator has completed and returned his/her background sheet, duplicate copies for the class. Divide class into groups of 4-5 students.
2. Conduct a brief class discussion in which students identify relevant background information about their state legislator and compare their perspectives/viewpoints with the legislator's. For example, teachers could ask students to point out

information about their legislator that surprises them. Do students agree with the legislator on issues facing their community? Is this particular legislator a neighbor? Does he/she live in school attendance area?

3. Tell students their task is to display the information provided by their legislator in a visual form-- for example, the legislator's briefcase. Ask students to brainstorm what this legislator might have in his/her briefcase, given the information provided to them. To get students started thinking, ask them if they think the legislator might have letters from constituents? About what particular issues? Might we find drafts of bills in his/her briefcase? If so, on what issues? Encourage groups to thoroughly examine the legislator information form and translate the information into documents and/or items we might find in our legislator's briefcase.

4. Provide each group with poster paper and markers. Allow several minutes for student groups to plan their poster.

5. When finished, post students' posters around the room. Ask class to identify similarities and differences among groups. Explain to students that when the state legislator visits the class in the next several days, they will have an opportunity to interact with their legislator to learn more about his/her responsibilities. Likewise, the guest legislator will interact with students to learn more about their viewpoints. He/she will have the opportunity to comment on the "contents" of their legislator briefcase and compare with his/her actual briefcase.

Background Information for the Legislator

Provided by the Instructor Prior to Visit

Instructions for School Official or Instructor: Please complete the following. The information provided will assist the legislator in preparing for his/her visit. If exact figures are not available please make estimates. Please identify estimates with the abbreviation est.

Section 1: About the Class

Title of Class_____

Number of Students_____

Grade Level of Class_____

Instructor_____

List the top five state and local political issues which students are most interested in (could be compiled from a survey or other means determined by the instructor or class. Possibilities include length of the school year, requirements for driver's licenses, regulations involving abortion, drinking age, seat belt safety requirements, air and water pollution regulations, land set aside for parks and open spaces, student testing requirements, qualifications for teachers, penalties for criminal behavior, location of highways, funding for schools, transportation, health, and social services.)

How was the list above created?

Please list other issues not mentioned above which you would like the legislator to address during the visit.

Section 2: Basic Demographics About the School

School Type (check one): Public___ Private___ Parochial___

School Location (check one): Urban___ Suburban___ Rural___

Percentage of students who are White___ Hispanic___ Black___ Asian___
Native American___ Other___

Percentage of students receiving reduced/free lunch_____

Percentage of special education students_____

Describe the level of parent involvement at your school (could include pto/pta activities, volunteer statistics, money raised, etc)

What educational issues seem to be most important in your school community?

Background Information about the Legislator for the Class Prior to the Visit

Name:_____

Political Background:

Educational Background:

What's the most compelling issue we face as a local community?

What are the people of your district like?

What's important to them?

What kind of issues do people contact you most about?

What kinds of legislation have you been most actively involved with?

Many politicians have stated they entered politics because they wanted to make a difference, what difference are you attempting to make in our state and district?

What else would you like to tell us or have us think about before your visit? (You may wish to include personal information that you believe students will be interested in knowing.)

Lesson Plan II - Do You Trust Our Government?

Introduction:

After creating an illustration of all the individuals who represent students at various levels of government, students take a survey on their attitudes about representative democracy and the level of trust they place in government. Students then ask their parents to complete the survey. To close the lesson, students make inferences about the level of trust each group has in our system of representative government.

Objectives:

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to:

- determine own representatives at various levels of government;
- complete a survey to assess the levels of trust in government held by their class and their parents;

Materials:

- Handout #1: Who Represents Me?
- Handout #2: Student Survey: Do You Trust Our Government?
- Transparency #1: Do You Trust Our Government? Student Results
- Transparency #2: Do You Trust Our Government? Parent Results
- poster paper, markers

Teaching Time: 2 class periods with homework

Note: It is suggested that results from the class survey be sent to the legislator before his/her visit to class.

Procedure:

1. Allow time for students to find out who represents them in various levels of government. Students can access this information at : http://www.vote-smart.org or call their county clerk, the League of Women Voters, or political party headquarters. Distribute Handout #1, Who Represents Me? Tell students to use the correct names and titles and create an illustration which shows how they are represented at various levels of government.

2. Duplicate enough copies of the survey (Handout #2) for each student and his/her parents. Allow a few minutes for students to complete this survey by circling the number that most closely matches how they feel about each pair of statements.

3. Next, tally students' responses for each item on Transparency #1. When finished, divide class into groups of 4-5 students. Tell groups to develop three or four generalizations about their level of trust in our system of government. Can students identify any specific events, issues, recent laws, or news stories that might account for their survey results? Does the level of trust vary with different levels of government? Explain that in the next several days, the state legislator identified on Handout #1 will visit the class. Given our survey results, what advice might you have for our guest legislator? What questions would do you have for the guest legislator?

4. Encourage students to give the survey to their parents. Using Transparency # 2, tally parent responses in the same way students' responses were tallied. If parent responses show significant differences in attitudes toward our government, ask students to hypothesize reasons for the differences. Teachers might also ask if student responses are similar to those of their parents. What might account for such similarities?

5. Collect all student surveys. In Lesson 8, Debriefing the Legislator Visit, students will take the survey again and compare responses. Send copies of the surveys to Jan Goehring, National Conference of State Legislatures, 1560 Broadway, Suite 700, Denver, CO 80202.

This project is supported by a Robert H. Michel Civic Education Grant sponsored by The Dirksen Congressional Center, Pekin, IL.

Lesson Plan III - The Mindwalk

Introduction:

State governments carry out much of the work of meeting the needs of citizens and most of the laws affecting citizens are state and local laws. Although this activity is intended to demonstrate to students the extent to which laws passed by all levels of government affect their lives, students will discover that given our system of federalism, laws passed by state governments impact their lives in many more ways than laws passed by the federal government. Although the U.S. Constitution does not specifically list the powers of state governments, the 10th Amendment gives to the states or to the people all powers not given to the national government or denied to the states.

Objectives:

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to:

- explain the extent to which law affects their lives;
- categorize laws by the level of government involved;
- explain the importance of the 10th Amendment;
- demonstrate their understanding of the impact of law on their lives by writing a short story about their lives.

Materials:

- Handout # 3: "The Mindwalk" (Teachers may wish to adapt this story to the context of students' own state.)
- Transparency #3: 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution
- Transparency #4: Enumerated Powers of Congress
- Colored pencils or markers

Teaching Time: One class period with homework

Procedure:

1. In preparation for a classroom visit by a state legislator from their district, read aloud or make copies and distribute Handout #3, The Mindwalk. Ask students to raise their hands at every point when they think the law is involved. Ask students to describe how the law is involved in that part of the story. Alternatively, arrange students into groups of 4-5 students. Have each group create a list of all of the laws that are mentioned in the story. Ask students if this story could be a typical story of their lives. Are students surprised at the extent to which law is a part of their lives?

2. Once students have determined the extent to which the law is involved in the story, ask them to hypothesize the level of government involved in each instance. Ask them to color code the items in the story using colored pencils or markers. Red will indicate the national laws, blue for state laws, and yellow for local laws. (Do not be concerned about exact answers.) Are students surprised that many of the laws from this story-- and, indeed, their own lives-- have been passed by state legislatures? (Suggested answers have been provided at the end of the lesson.)

3. As another alternative, divide students into three groups. Tell students that groups will "claim" each law or policy given in the story. Give the first group a sign with the word "federal"; the second group, "state"; and the third, "local." As the story is read, each group should raise its sign and "claim" that particular policy. When finished, ask the group that claimed the state policies/laws to make some generalizations about the laws that they claimed. Students should realized that many of the laws from this story have been passed by their state legislature.

4. Ask if any students know why so many laws involved in their lives are passed by state legislatures? To provide background for students, show Transparency #3, The 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

5. Teachers may wish to provide an explanation of federalism to students. Before the Constitution was written each state already had its own constitution. Many delegates to the Constitutional Convention in 1787 wanted state governments to retain much of their power. Other delegates argued that only a strong national government could handle the problems facing our country. The framers settled upon a system known as federalism, in which some powers are divided between the national and state governments, while allowing them to share other powers. Students may already know that the Constitution lists the powers of the national government. Teachers may display Transparency # 4, Enumerated Powers of Congress, Article 1, Section 8, or refer students to Article 1, Section 8 in the U.S. Constitution. Students should note that the Constitution does not specifically list the powers of the states. Instead, the 10th Amendment gives to the states or to the people all powers not given to the national government or denied to the states.

6. Explain that in the next several days, one of their state legislators will visit the class. Although members of Congress tend to get more attention in the news media, state legislators actually make most of the laws that affect our daily lives. In preparation for this visit, have students scan the local newspaper, monitor the local news, or go to their state's internet homepage to identify some policy issues that their state legislature is currently discussing. Students should bring a list of issues to class the next day. On the following day, compile a class list of issues that students have found reported in the local media.

Suggested Homework Activities:

1. Students can write their own "mindwalk" story. Select some stories to be read aloud by students during the next class period. Have students list the laws involved and then categorize them according to the level of government that created the law.

2. Students might wish to create a humorous illustration in which they use symbols (i.e., speed limit signs, newspaper headlines, driver's licenses, a dog license, food labels, mattress pad tags) to show the extent to which laws affect our lives. Symbols should be identified by the level of government involved in each example.

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Lesson Plan IV - What Is Public Policy?

Introduction:

Public policy is an agreed upon way that our government fulfills its responsibilities to protect individual rights and to promote the common welfare. State legislators debate, discuss, and pass into law public polices that affect our lives. In this lesson students work in discussion groups to create a Venn Diagram in which they identify ideas about public issues and policies that they have in common.

Objectives:

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to:

- identify public policy issues at the local, state, and national levels;
- use a Venn Diagram to focus discussion on a public issue;
- define public issue, public policy;
- hypothesize about the nature of legislative debate.

Materials:

- Transparency #5: What Is Public Policy?
- Handout #4: Sample Issues List
- Transparency #6: Venn Diagram
- Handout #5: Venn Diagram

Procedure:

1. Show students transparency #5, What Is Public Policy? Conduct a short brainstorm in which students list public policies from any level of government that they are familiar with. Check their understanding of the levels of government by asking them to list their ideas in four columns: federal, state, local, school. For example:

   - Students probably know that school districts make policies about student discipline and that teachers and principals are given the authority to enforce these policies.
   - Congress recently passed a reduction in income taxes which will be enforced by the Internal Revenue Service, an agency of the executive branch.
   - State legislators make laws about driving and police officers enforce driving laws.
   - Local governments (city, county, township, etc.) often pass policies prohibiting liquor stores near schools or billboard advertising on certain streets. Different departments within local government enforce these policies.

2. Next, ask students to identify issues currently being discussed at the national or state level (i.e., Congress-- stem cell research, patients' bill of rights, Social Security, campaign finance reform, missile defense, Kyoto Protocol; state legislatures-- issues will differ among states, but perhaps cell phone ban while driving, state competency exams, death penalty debates, school violence, gambling laws, voluntary school prayer, or gun control legislation might be on the public agenda in your state; school issues might include school uniforms, student testing, character education, etc.)

3. Explain to students that when people become aware of problems in their communities, they often want government to develop and carry out policies to deal with these problems. U.S. citizens have a First Amendment right to say what they think government should do about problems in the local community, state, nation, and even on an international level. Citizens also have a right to try to influence the decisions government officials make about addressing all of these problems.

4. Distribute Handout #4, Sample Issues List (or create your own class list or use the student-created list from the previous lesson). Place students in groups of three and ask them to highlight items that they consider to be issues for their state legislators. Next, ask student groups to agree upon one state issue/problem for discussion. It is important that students understand that at this point in the lesson they do not need to agree upon what to do about the issue/problem. As a matter of fact, the activity will be more productive and meaningful if students disagree about what course of action, if any, government should take.

5. Introduce the characteristics of the Venn Diagram using Transparency #6. Explain the various parts of the Venn Diagram to students. Ask them to point out which area shows the similarities shared by A and B? A and C? B and C? Which area represents what all three-- A, B, and C-- have in common?

6. Distribute Handout #5, Venn Diagram. At the top of the page they should write the state issue they have selected. Then they should identify person A, B, and C. Each student (A, B, and C) will explain and fill in the appropriate section of the Venn diagram with his/her individual position on an issue.

7. Allow groups about five minutes to discuss the issue and to propose a public policy to address this particular issue. Tell them that the goal of this part of the lesson is to reach the center of the Venn Diagram, an area that represents the ideas about the issue that all three group members can agree upon. Explain to students that their agreed upon idea at the center of the diagram could be a proposed new policy. Students should be encouraged to compromise and negotiate in order to reach the center of the diagram. Students should also fill in the areas of the diagram in which person A agrees with B, A agrees with C, etc.

Note: If students are unfamiliar with a Venn Diagram, teachers may wish to allow time for groups of students to practice by identifying similarities and differences among their pets, favorite subjects, number of siblings, future careers, etc. Write out the differences and similarities in the appropriate parts of the diagram. At the center students should write what all three persons have in common.

8. If time permits, have students discuss another issue and try to reach agreement using additional Venn Diagrams.

9. Ask several student groups to report to the rest of the class. Did groups select the same issues? Was there a great deal of disagreement about what should be done to address this issue/problem? Was it difficult to reach the center of the Venn Diagram? Was compromise necessary in order to reach agreement at the center of the diagram? Did any group reach agreement on a new public policy to address an issue? If you had been given more time, do you think you could have reached agreement? Encourage students to hypothesize about the similarities between this activity and the process of policy making for legislators.

10. Explain to students that disagreements are common in our diverse communities and hence, our legislatures. Many citizens have competing interests. We don't always get everything we want in a new public policy. At any level of government, discussion, debate, compromise, and negotiation on public issues are important components of the policy making process in our representative democracy. The policy making process involves a lot of argument as legislators attempt to find areas of agreement for the different values and interest of the many constituents they each represent. Sometimes these differences are debated for a long time and many are settled through compromise.

11. To close the lesson, explain to students that their state legislator will visit class within the next several days. Students should prepare a summary paragraph on the state issue and the compromise they reached in the center of their Venn Diagram. They should also develop several questions for their state legislator about the issue and/or policy they discussed in their small groups.

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Lesson Plan V - A Day in the Life

Introduction

To learn about the legislative process, students will examine their legislator's personal calendar and consider the skills legislators use and the various activities that comprise a typical day. To prepare for this lesson, teachers need to ask the visiting state legislator to send several pages of his/her daytimer or personal calendar in advance and create transparencies for classroom use. Legislators should be encouraged to select a day that includes some of the following activities: dealing with constituent problems, listening to diverse points of view on a difficult issues, negotiating, compromising, decision-making, and balancing his/her personal and professional life with a legislative life.

Objectives:

At the conclusion of this activity, students should be able to:

- examine some of the daily activities of state legislators;
- hypothesize about the skills used by a state legislators;
- compare and contrast their views about the work of legislators with the real life experience of a state legislator.

Teaching Time: one class period

Materials:

- poster paper, markers
- transparency made from legislator's daytimer or personal calendar

Procedure:

1. Begin by asking students to consider what activities make up a typical school day for them. A summer day? A weekend day?

2. Ask students to explain what a daytimer or personal calendar looks like. What purpose does a daytimer or personal calendar have? Perhaps students are familiar with daytimers as a method of keeping track of homework assignments, tests, long-range projects, field trips, and other school related activities. Ask students what a stranger could learn about them by looking at their personal calendar? What insights can be gleaned about your their life by looking at a "typical" school day? What insights can you make about the work of your parents by examining their daytimers?

3. Arrange students into small groups. Give each group one sheet of poster paper and a marker. Tell students to create an enlarged page-- a template only--from their daytimer on the poster paper.

4. Explain that in the next several days their state legislator will visit class. In preparation for this visit, students will now brainstorm a list of activities they think a legislator participates in during a typical day when the legislature is in session. You might wish to get them started with some of the following: time for research, meetings, hearings, briefings. Then ask students to brainstorm a list of the skills needed to be a successful state legislator. To prompt them for this list, you might mention listening skills, parliamentary procedures, leadership abilities, negotiation skills, etc.

5. Next, based on what they know or have heard about state legislators, each group should fill in the enlarged daytimer page with activities that they consider to be "typical" for their state legislator. Title their poster "A Day in the Life." Post each group's example around the room. Ask students to identify similarities and differences among the groups' daytimers. What generalizations can the class make about the daily life of a state legislator?

6. Explain to students that the guest legislator has sent several pages from his/her daytimer to class. Show the transparency. Ask students to identify each of the various daily activities of their legislator. What types of activities consume the greatest amount of time on a typical day for this legislator? What skills do you think the legislator needs for each of the activities given on his/her daytimer? How accurate were students' perceptions of a "typical" day for this state legislator?

7. To close this lesson, explain to students that early in our nation's history, the demands on state governments were not great. Citizen-legislators could leave their jobs for a few weeks each year to participate in legislative sessions in their state's capital. These citizen-legislators had other jobs in their home communities. Today, the work of a state legislator is far more complex and many state legislators are actually full time lawmakers. Many have college degrees in political science, law, or public administration and plan on a full time career in politics.

8. On the day of the actual visit , select several groups to show and explain their versions of the legislator's daytimer. Ask the legislator to comment on the accuracy of students' portrayal of his/her typical day. Again, display the transparency of the legislator's actual daytimer to students. The legislator and teacher can then conduct a brief discussion in which students identify the similarities and differences between students' perceptions and his/her actual typical day at the legislature. Ask students to identify any new insights into the work of a legislator they have acquired by examining their legislator's personal

calendar. Make a list of the activities and skills required to be a successful state legislator.

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Lesson Plan VI - How Should Our Guest Legislator Decide?

A Public Hearing Simulation*

Introduction

Students and a guest legislator participate in a simulated legislative hearing in which the legislator and his/her staff seek input from constituents about a bill to raise the age at which teenagers can obtain a driver's license from age16 to 18. Students take on the roles of parents, insurance companies, youth, state highway commissioners, police officers and used car salesmen. Students groups present testimony before the guest legislator and several students role-playing staff members. The guest legislator debriefs the lesson with students, comparing the simulated hearing to an actual hearing.

Objectives:

At the conclusion of this activity, students should be able to:

- define common welfare in the context of competing interests in their community;
- explain the importance of a legislator seeking input from diverse members of the community;
- participate in a simulated legislative hearing

Materials:

- Handout #6: A Public Hearing

Teaching Time: one class period

Procedure:

1. As students learned in an earlier lesson, What Is a Public Policy, the main responsibility of the legislative branch is to pass policies that protect individual rights and promote the common welfare. To begin this lesson, ask the guest legislator to conduct a short brainstorming session (5 minutes) in which students list all the ideas that come to mind when they hear the term, common welfare. The teacher should list their ideas on the board.

2. Ask the guest legislator to explain to students how he/she learns about a problem (letters, phone calls, emails, debates, committee meetings). Distribute Handout #6 to students. After reading the handout, divide class into 8 even groups. One group should work with the guest legislator and represent his staff. The other groups should represent constituents in your state by assuming the following roles:

parents, insurance companies, youth, state highway commissioners, police officers, and used car salesmen.

3. Allow about 5-7 minutes for groups to develop a position based on their roles and to prepare a short presentation for the public hearing. Each of the groups should tell the legislator and staff how the legislator should vote on this issue at a public hearing to be held in several minutes. Groups should select a primary spokesperson, though others may make additional comments.

4. While the constituent groups are preparing their testimony, the guest legislator and students assigned to role play staff members should brainstorm several questions they will ask each group following each group's testimony.

5. Arrange the classroom so that the guest legislator and his staff are in the front of the room for the public hearing. Teachers may wish to make name cards for the legislator and staff. Ask the guest legislator to call on each of the groups (7) to hear their testimony. Teachers should act as timekeepers, making sure that students' testimony does not exceed 2-3 minutes.

6. After each group has presented, the legislator and his/her staff should discuss the problem and decide what action to take. This group should then explain their decision to the class. This discussion should occur in front of the class. Only the legislator and his/her staff should be allowed to speak.

7. To debrief this lesson, allow students to ask questions of the guest legislators. Suggested follow-up questions are also given below:

- How realistic was our legislative hearing compared to real hearings? What are the similarities and differences between our class hearing and actual hearings?
- What happens when constituent needs and wants conflict with what a legislator believes to be right?
- What happens when constituent needs and wants conflict with the common welfare?
- What issues do you think our class should watch for in this legislative session?
- Of these issues, which máy pose similar dilemmas between constituent views and your own personal views? Between the common good and your constituents' interests?
- What are the powerful interests in our state?

** This lesson is adapted from: We the People.....the Citizen and the Constitution (elementary edition), Center for Civic Education, Calabasas, CA, p. 84-86.*

This project is supported by a Robert H. Michel Civic Education Grant sponsored by The Dirksen Congressional Center, Pekin, IL.

Lesson Plan VII - The Legislative In-Basket

Introduction:

This lesson requires teachers and legislators to collect and develop student materials unique to your state. (See "Teacher Preparation" below.) Also, teachers may wish to use this lesson as an assessment of the previous lessons which focus on the legislator visit to the classroom. Students will take on the roles of legislative aides and assistants to the guest legislator. Student groups are given an "in-basket" with several different documents (letters from constituents, faxes, emails, memos, newspaper editorials, messages from other legislators, etc.) Each document requires a focused response from student groups to demonstrate their understanding of the legislative process.

Objectives:

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to:

- develop written responses to demonstrate an understanding of the legislative process at the state level;
- interact with their state legislator to develop appropriate responses to various issues and constituent concerns.

Materials:

- Student Handout #7: Legislative In-Basket
- Wire baskets for each group (or shoe boxes)
- See below, "Teacher and Legislator Preparation"

Teacher and Legislator Preparation:

To prepare for this lesson, follow the suggestions given below to prepare items that are appropriate within the context of your own state:

1. Teachers will need to find actual items on pending state issues (i.e., news editorials, letters to the editor) for the legislative "in-basket."

2. Teachers will find it helpful to contact the legislator who will visit class and request some items to be included (i.e., constituent letters with names removed).

3. Legislators and teachers will probably need to create fictional items (i.e., letters to the editor or constituent letters) for the legislative "in-basket."

4. It is suggested that teachers develop and include some items that clearly contain constituent requests that are not within the realm of state government (i.e., U.S. Supreme Court nominations, federal income taxes, etc.).

5. Some items could, in fact, be state issues, but may fall within the powers of the governor or state courts (i.e., pardons) .

6. Others could clearly represent local issues (i.e., curfews for teenagers, neighborhood graffiti).

7. Try to find and/or create 10 different items for inclusion in the in-basket.

8. Finally, duplicate enough sets for several groups of students.

9. Place documents (10) prepared in advance into wire baskets (or shoe boxes) to create enough in-boxes for each group of students.

10. To save time on the day of the legislator visit, teachers should set up student groups ahead of time, so that as students arrive to class on the next day, no time will be needed to arrange groups. Groups should also agree upon a leader.

Teaching Time: one to two class periods, with homework

Procedure:

- Duplicate copies of Handout #7, The Legislator In-Basket. On the day of the legislator visit, the teacher and legislator should collaborate in setting up, assisting students, and debriefing this lesson. Since the legislator will most likely visit class for one day, it is important to keep track of time during this lesson.

- Divide class into groups of five or six students. Distribute Handout #7 and one legislator in-basket to each group.

- Allow groups several minutes to review the documents in the in-basket. Tell them to quickly reach agreement on who will be responsible for responding to each item. Students should then fill out the chart.

- The guest legislator and teacher should begin to circulate around the room and assist students as they prepare rough drafts of responses to the in-basket items. Encourage students to use information they have gained from all previous activities in preparing their responses.

- To close the activity, ask groups to report how they would respond to each item in the in-basket. Encourage the state legislator to provide feedback to students. Instruct students to take some notes on the legislator's remarks, so they can develop better responses as their homework assignment.

- Finally, as a homework assignment students should prepare final copies of their responses. Review with student the proper response format for each of the documents in their in-basket (i.e., formal letter, email, fax, letter to editor, etc.). Tell students that their responses are due the next day-- in an out-basket.

Note: The idea for a legislative in-basket has been adapted from a Colorado civics content standards assessment developed in 1997 by F. Mile Miles, Harrison School District, Colorado Springs, CO.

This project is supported by a Robert H. Michel Civic Education Grant sponsored by The Dirksen Congressional Center, Pekin, IL.

Lesson Plan VIII - Debriefing the Visit: A Legislator Resume

Introduction

As a class assessment and to debrief the legislator classroom visit, students review previous lessons and demonstrate greater depth of understanding about the responsibilities of state legislators. Students again complete the survey from Lesson 2, Do You Trust Your Government? They compare responses with earlier survey results. Working in groups, students develop a resume for the legislator who visited their class. To develop the resume, students review the previous lessons by reexamining the special legislator briefcase developed in Lesson 1, Getting to Know You, and the legislator's personal calendar from Lesson 5, A Day in the Life.

Objectives:

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to:

- develop a legislator resume using knowledge about the legislator and legislative process gained in previous lessons.
- Synthesize information about the legislative process.

Materials:

- Handout # 2, Do You Trust Your Government?
- Student surveys from Lesson 2, Do You Trust Your Government?
- Student illustrations of legislator's briefcase from Lesson 1, Getting to Know You
- Student illustrations of personal calendars from Lesson 5, A Day in the Life
- poster paper, markers

Teaching Time: One class period and homework.

Procedure:

1. To begin this assessment activity, duplicate and distribute survey, Do You Trust Your Government? (Handout #2). Ask students to fill out the survey again. When finished, pass back the survey students completed in Lesson 2. Students should compare their responses with those given earlier. Conduct a class discussion in which students point out changes in their knowledge and attitudes about state government. Encourage students to cite specific insights about state government gained from learning about and interacting with their state legislator.

2. For the next part of the activity, allow students to work with one partner. Explain that working in pairs, students will develop a special resume for the legislator who visited their class.

3. Review with students the content and purpose of a resume. Discuss possible categories usually included in a resume (i.e., background, work experiences, special skills, accomplishments, and references.) Although experts consider a one page resume as an ideal, for the purpose of this assessment, student-created legislator resumes should be two or three pages in length.

4. For this debriefing activity, students will need all of the materials and products they developed in earlier lessons. To help students begin to compile a first draft of their legislator resume and to provide some direction for students, tell them to consider all that they have learned about their legislator and the legislative process from the previous activities and by interacting with the guest legislator: For example:

   - Ask them to reexamine the information sheet completed by the legislator and the illustrations of the legislator's "briefcase" students created earlier in Lesson 1, Getting to Know You.

   - What experiences and skills might a legislator need to address the public's general level of trust about our government? Students should use the pre and post survey, Do You Trust Your Government?

   - Review what they have learned about a typical day by reflecting on what they learned by examining the legislator's personal calendar studied in Lesson 5, A Day in the Life.

   - What skills were needed to complete the Venn Diagram in Lesson 4 , What Is Public Policy? What skills were needed in the public hearing simulation in Lesson 6 and in the legislator's in-basket in Lesson 7?

   - Would students consider being a reference on their legislator's resume? Why or why not?

5. Close the lesson by asking students to write individual thank-you letters to the state legislator who visited their class. Their letters must include at least three specific ideas students learned about or gained new information about as a result of his/her visit to class. At the teacher's and legislator's discretion, student-developed legislator resumes could be included with students' thank-you letters.

Alternatively, teachers may choose to write a group thank-you letter for the entire class to sign. Teachers should ask the class to agree upon three specific ideas they gained more information about as a result of the legislator visiting and teaching their class. Select a range of student-created legislator resumes to include with the class thank-you letter.

Handout #1
Who Represents Me?

How many individuals represent you:

- In the state legislature?
- In Congress?
- What about in your town or county?
- What about in your school?

Make a list of all the people -- from your student council to the U.S. Congress -- that represent you below. Then create an illustration to display your information.

To use the internet, go to: http://www.vote-smart.org. Type in your zip code. If you are unable to use the internet, you can call your county clerk, the League of Women Voters, or Democratic or Republican Party Headquarters. For more information about state legislative sites go to http://www.ncsl.org/public/sitesleg.htm.

This project is supported by a Robert H. Michel Civic Education Grant sponsored by The Dirksen Congressional Center, Pekin, IL.

Handout #2
Student Survey – Do You Trust Our Government?

First, we would like to know something about you.

1) What state are you from?

2) Please select the best description of your position:

Legislator
Legislative Staff
Other government employee
Lobbyist
News Media
Educator
Student
General Public
Academic Political Scientist

3) How old are you?

Under 18
18-34
35-49
50-64
65 or over

4) Gender: Male Female

5) Did you vote in the last general election? Yes No

6) On a scale of 1 to 5, how knowledgeable would you say you are about government and public affairs?

1 -- Not very knowledgeable
2
3
4
5 -- Very knowledgeable

7) On a scale of 1 to 5, how involved would you say you are in government, your community or public affairs?

1 -- Not very involved
2
3
4
5 -- Very involved

Now answer all of the following questions to gauge your level of trust in representative democracy.

8) Following are six pairs of differing views about representative democracy. Please circle the number that most closely matches your level of agreement with one or the other of these statements. Numbers 2-6 represent "in-between" degrees of agreement.

8a)

1 -- Most legislators act unethically and are out for themselves.

2

3

4

5

6

7 -- Most legislators are out to promote the public welfare as they and their constituents see it.

8b)

1 -- Legislators don't care what regular people think.

2

3

4

5

6

7 -- Legislators care deeply about what their constituents want.

8c)

1 -- Americans agree on what is right and necessary, so the legislature should just pass the laws that the people want.

2

3

4

5

6

7 -- People disagree on most issues except at a general level, and the legislature must resolve the clash of values and interests.

8d)

1 -- Legislators are the servants of special interests that look out for themselves, not the will of the regular people. A few big interests run the government.

2

3

4

5

6

7 -- There is an organized interest for almost every conceivable policy interest that anyone might have. The number and diversity of organized interests ensure that all sides of an issue are heard but not that any one group comes out ahead.

8e

1 -- The lawmaking process doesn't work well because of politics, unprincipled deal making and needless conflict.

2

3

4

5

6

7 -- Making laws is a contentious process because it takes in so many competing values, interests and constituencies.

8f

1 -- Politicians are not accountable for their actions.

2

3

4

5

6

7 -- Politicians, who must run for office every two or four years, are as accountable as anyone can be.

Where do you stand in the spectrum of trust in government?

Handout #3
The Mindwalk

I woke up today to the sound of my clock radio (1) -- 6:00 am. (2) As I made my bed, I laughed at the tag attached to my mattress: "Do not remove under penalty of law." (3) Ha! How ridiculous-- police in my bedroom!

I couldn't decide what to wear (4) today, remembering that our class was going on a science field trip (5) in the afternoon to take water samples (6) at a river several miles from our school. Should I wear my new or old sneakers? After phoning (7) a friend and reading an email from another, I decided on the old ones.

For breakfast, I drank some orange juice (8) and ate a bowl of Wheaties. (9) Since, I still had some time before the school bus (10) would arrive down the block, I decided to take my dog for a short walk (11) around the corner to the mailbox (12) to mail some letters.

On the way, I stopped at the convenience store to buy something (13) for lunch, since I wouldn't be eating in the school cafeteria (14) today. At the store, I noticed the new advertisement for the state lottery (15) and wished for a moment that I was old enough (16) to buy a ticket-- I knew I could win! I glanced at the headlines of the newspaper: Congress Addresses Health Care Concerns (17) . Then I noticed that the clerk had posted new signs about the penalties for minors (18) who try to purchase cigarettes and alcohol (19).

Yesterday I remember that my science teacher (20) had told our class that the skills we would use in taking water samples would help us on the state science exam (21) at the end of the year. Our language arts teacher added that our lab reports would help prepare us for the state writing exam (22).

I lost track of time so I missed the bus. I had to ask my older brother to take me to school in his car (23) on his way to high school. He said he would take me. So he got a cup of coffee (24) and I got in his car and fastened my seat belt. (25) I glanced at the gas gauge and told him that it might be a good idea to fill up with gas (26) on the way. I couldn't wait until I would have my driver's license-- (27) just 2 more years-- and my own credit (28) card!

The 7:00 am newscast began with a report on the Kyoto Protocol, (29) a treaty requiring nations to limit the amount of greenhouse gasses emitted into the air which President Bush, who won our state's electoral votes (30) in November, has refused to sign. The news from our state included a report on several crimes (31) committed recently and an update on a high profile trial involving the death penalty (32).

En route to school, we saw the police (33) stop a driver-- most likely for speeding, (34) I thought. The man got out of his car and began to use his cell phone (35), probably to tell

someone he was going to be late for work! We noticed a number of houses for sale (36). Traffic was slow because workers were repairing the main street (37) on our route to school.

I made it on time to my first period class-- social studies. The teacher told us to open our books to the chapter about federalism and asked us to what extent we think law affects our lives. I thought for a minute, raised my hand and said, "Not much-- unless I rip the tag off my mattress!"

Suggested Answers for Handout #3 - Mindwalk

1. FCC, Federal Licensing Laws
2. National Bureau of Standards
3. Federal Consumer Protection Laws
4. Federal Import Controls
5. Local School District Regulations; must conform to State Laws
6. Federal Environmental Laws
7. Federal Communication Licensing Laws
8. Federal Pure food and Drug Act
9. Federal Pure Food and Drug Act
10. State School Transportation Laws
11. Local leash laws and dog licensing ordinances
12. Federal Postal Laws
13. State and/or local sales tax
14. State School Cafeteria Regulations; Federal School Lunch Program
15. State Gaming Laws
16. Federal Birth Registry
17. (Proposed) federal laws; existing federal laws; state health insurance laws
18. State laws prohibiting sales of tobacco, alcohol minors
19. Federal Excise Taxes
20. State Teacher Licensing Laws
21. State Student Competency Exams

40

22. State Student Competency Exams

23. State Motor Vehicle laws

24. Federal Import Controls

25. State Motor Vehicle laws

26. Federal and State Gas taxes

27. State Motor Vehicle laws

28. State, Federal Contract law

29. Federal laws (debate over International Treaty)

30. State Election laws

31. State Criminal Code

32. State Criminal Code

33. State or local driving laws

34. State or local speed limits

35. State laws prohibiting the use of cell phones while driving (proposed and passed in some states).

36. Federal mortgage laws, state contract laws

37. State and/or federal highway funds.

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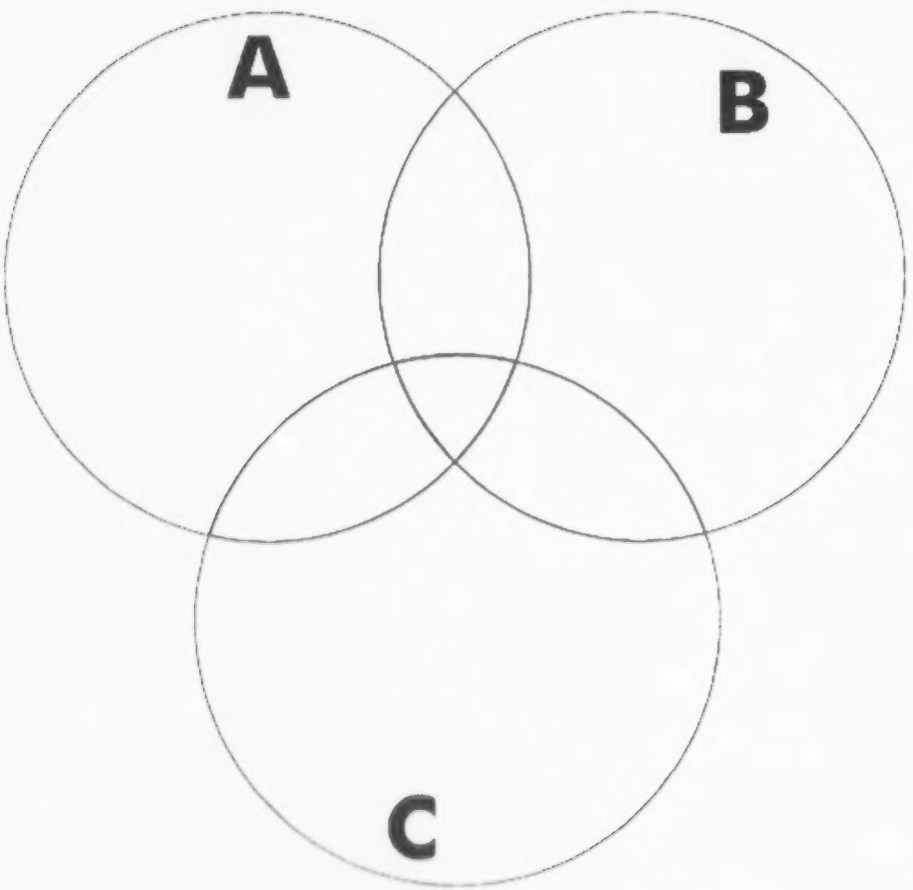
Handout #4
Sample Issue List

Abortion
Affirmative Action Programs
Agriculture regulations
AIDS Research
Airplane Safety
Animal Cruelty
Assisted Suicide
Billboard Advertisements
Bicycle Safety
Campaign Finance
CD Warning Labels
Cell Phone Use
Civil Lawsuit limits
Consumer Safety
Clean Air
Community Recycling
Consumer Credit
Consumer Product Recalls
Copyrights
Copyrights on Internet
Curfews
Currency
Criminal Laws
Death Penalty
Disabled Workers
Disaster Relief
Drinking Age
Drivers Licensing
Drug Research
Drug Testing
Drug Traffic Laws
Drunk Driving Laws
Energy Conservation
Electoral College
Emissions
Employee privacy (i.e., mail)
Endangered Species
Environmental Protection
Exports
Flag Burning
Fetal Cell Tissue Research
Food Safety
Genetic Engineering
Graffiti Penalties
Growth Policies
Gun Controls
Hate Crimes
Health Care
Helmet Laws
Income Taxes
Immigration
Import Regulations
International Trade
International Travel
Internet Privacy
Jury Duty
Juveniles tried as adults
Legalized Gambling
Lotteries
Medical Marijuana
Minimum Wage
Military Service
Missile Defense Treaty
Mortgages
Motor Vehicles
National Monuments/Parks
NATO
National Weather Service
Naturalization Laws
Nuclear Waste Disposal
Nursing Homes
Organ Transplants
Panhandling
Peace Treaties
Photo-radar speeding tickets
Post Offices
Pot Holes
Prescription Drugs
Prisons
Puerto Rico Statehood
Racial Profiling
Refugees
Religious Practices
Road Repair
Seat Belts
Sales Taxes
School Curriculum
School Funding
School Lunch Programs
School Prayer
School Records
School Uniforms
School Year Length
Sexual Harassment
Smoking Regulations
Social Security
State Parks
Student Privacy
Student Testing
Stem Cell Research
Teacher licensing
Term Limits
Traffic Laws
TV Violence
Unemployment
U.S. Troops in Bosnia, Korea, Europe
Vehicle Safety
Veterans' Issues
Vicious Dogs
Video Game Restrictions
Voting Machinery
Voter Registration
Washington DC Statehood
Water quality
Welfare
Worker Safety
Youth Violence
Zoning Ordinances

Handout #5

Venn Diagram

Issue: _____



Person A _____

Person B _____

Person C _____

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Handout #6

A Public Hearing

- One of the major causes of death in our nation is automobile accidents. Studies have shown that a large percentage of these accidents are caused by inexperienced teenage drivers. A bill is before our state legislature that would raise the driving age from 16 to 18.

- Some of the constituents in our guest legislator's district believe that many teenagers are too immature to drive without supervision. These constituents believe our roads would be safer if the age at which a person can drive was raised from 16 to 18.

- However, our guest legislator votes for the bill, employees of the Department of Motor Vehicles would probably lose jobs and used car dealerships in his/her district would lose business. On the other hand, insurance companies would benefit because there would be fewer claims filed.

- Our guest legislator is supposed to support laws that protect people's rights and must decide how to vote on the bill. Should he/she vote against the bill to protect jobs? Should he/she vote for the bill because many lives would be saved? The legislator's staff has scheduled a public hearing in your community to seek input from interested parties. Your interest group plans to present testimony identifying and defending your position on the proposed legislation.

Your group should prepare a 2-3 minute position statement to be given at this public hearing. Your testimony/presentation should address the following questions:

- What rights are involved in this situation?
- Which rights do you consider most important? Why?
- What is the common welfare in this situation?
- How do you think our guest legislator should vote?

Handout # 7

The Legislative In-Basket

- For this assessment, your group will pretend that you are special assistants to the legislator visiting our class.
- Your group is in charge of responding to each of the documents in the "Legislative In-Basket" given to each group.
- Included in your in-basket are 10 items that require a response. Some are actual documents from the local news; some have been contributed by our guest legislator; others are somewhat "fictitious"-- developed especially for this class activity.

Directions:

1. First, as a group briefly examine all the documents. Take a few minutes to talk about what you consider an appropriate response to each document for your legislator.
2. Next, divide the task among group members, using the chart below. For example, if you have 5 group members, each member should write out responses that address two different documents.
3. When your group is finished, we will ask our guest legislator to critique your work and provide feedback on your responses.

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TRANSPARENCY #1
Do You Trust Our Government?
Student Results

On a scale of 1 to 5, how knowledgeable would you say you are about government and public affairs?	1 – Not Very Knowledgeable	2	3	4	5 – Very Knowledgeable
On a scale of 1 to 5, how involved would you say you are in government, your community or public affairs?	1 – Not Very Involved				5 – Very Involved

1 - Most legislators act unethically and are out for themselves.	2	3	4	5	6	7 - Most legislators are out to promote the public welfare as they and their constituents see it.
1 - Legislators don't care what regular people think.	2	3	4	5	6	7 - Legislators care deeply about what their constituents want.
1 - Americans agree on what is right and necessary, so the legislature should just pass the laws that the people want.	2	3	4	5	6	7 -- People disagree on most issues except at a general level, and the legislature must resolve the clash of values and interests.
1 - Legislators are the servants of special interests that look out for themselves, not the will of the regular people. A few big interests run the government.	2	3	4	5	6	7 - There is an organized interest for almost every conceivable policy interest that anyone might have. The number and diversity of organized interests ensure that all sides of an issue are heard but not that any one group comes out ahead.
1 - The law-making process doesn't work well because of politics, unprincipled deal making and needless conflict.	2	3	4	5	6	7 - Making laws is a contentious process because it takes in so many competing values, interests & constituencies.
1 -- Politicians are not accountable for their actions.	2	3	4	5	6	7 - Politicians, who must run for office every two or four years, are as accountable as anyone can be.

TRANSPARENCY #2
Do You Trust Our Government?
Parent Results

On a scale of 1 to 5, how knowledgeable would you say you are about government and public affairs?	1 – Not Very Knowledgeable	2	3	4	5 – Very Knowledgeable
On a scale of 1 to 5, how involved would you say you are in government, your community or public affairs?	1 – Not Very Involved				5 – Very Involved

1 - Most legislators act unethically and are out for themselves.	2	3	4	5	6	7 - Most legislators are out to promote the public welfare as they and their constituents see it.
1 - Legislators don't care what regular people think.	2	3	4	5	6	7 - Legislators care deeply about what their constituents want.
1 - Americans agree on what is right and necessary, so the legislature should just pass the laws that the people want.	2	3	4	5	6	7 -- People disagree on most issues except at a general level, and the legislature must resolve the clash of values and interests.
1 - Legislators are the servants of special interests that look out for themselves, not the will of the regular people. A few big interests run the government.	2	3	4	5	6	7 - There is an organized interest for almost every conceivable policy interest that anyone might have. The number and diversity of organized interests ensure that all sides of an issue are heard but not that any one group comes out ahead.
1 - The law-making process doesn't work well because of politics, unprincipled deal making and needless conflict.	2	3	4	5	6	7 - Making laws is a contentious process because it takes in so many competing values, interests & constituencies.
1 -- Politicians are not accountable for their actions.	2	3	4	5	6	7 - Politicians, who must run for office every two or four years, are as accountable as anyone can be.

Transparency #3

Tenth Amendment U.S. Constitution

The Powers Not Delegated To The United States By The Constitution, Nor Prohibited By It To The States, Are Reserved To The States Respectively, Or To The People.

50

Transparency #4

U.S. Constitution
Article 1, Section 8
Enumerated Powers Of Congress

- The Congress shall have the power to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts and excises, to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States; but all duties, imposts and excises shall be uniform throughout the United States;

- To borrow money on the credit of the United States;

- To regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian Tribes;

- To establish an uniform rule of naturalization, and uniform laws on the subject of bankruptcies throughout the United States;

- To coin money, regulate the value thereof, and of foreign coin, and fix the standard of weights and measures;

- To provide for the punishment of counterfeiting the securities and current coin of the United States;

- To establish post offices and post roads;

- To promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and investors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries;

- To constitute tribunals inferior to the Supreme Court;

- To define and punish piracies and felonies committed on the high seas, and offenses against the law of nations;

- To declare war, grant letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make rules concerning captures on land and water;

- To raise and support armies, but no appropriation of money to that use shall be for a longer term than two years;

- To provide and maintain a navy;

- To make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces;

- To provide for calling forth the militia to execute the laws of the union, suppress insurrections and repel invasions;

- To provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining, the militia, and for governing such part of them as may be employed in the service of the United States, reserving to the states respectively, the appointment of the officers, and the authority of training the militia according to the discipline prescribed by Congress;

- To exercise exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever, over such District (not exceeding ten miles square) as may, by cession of particular states, and the acceptance of Congress, become the seat of the government of the United States, and to exercise like authority over all places purchased by the consent of the legislature of the state in which the same shall be, for the erection of forts, magazines, arsenals, dockyards and other needful buildings; and

- To make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers, and all other powers vested by this Constitution in the government of the United States, or in any department or officer thereof.

Transparency #5

What Is A Public Policy?

In the U.S. a public policy is an agreed upon way that our government fulfills it responsibilities to protect individual rights and promote the common welfare.

- **Some public policies are written into laws by legislatures (i.e., Congress, State Legislatures, City Councils, School Boards, etc.).**

- **Other policies are contained in rules and regulations created by executive branches of government (i.e., President, Governor, Mayor, School Superintendent, etc.), the branches of government responsible for carrying out and enforcing laws.**

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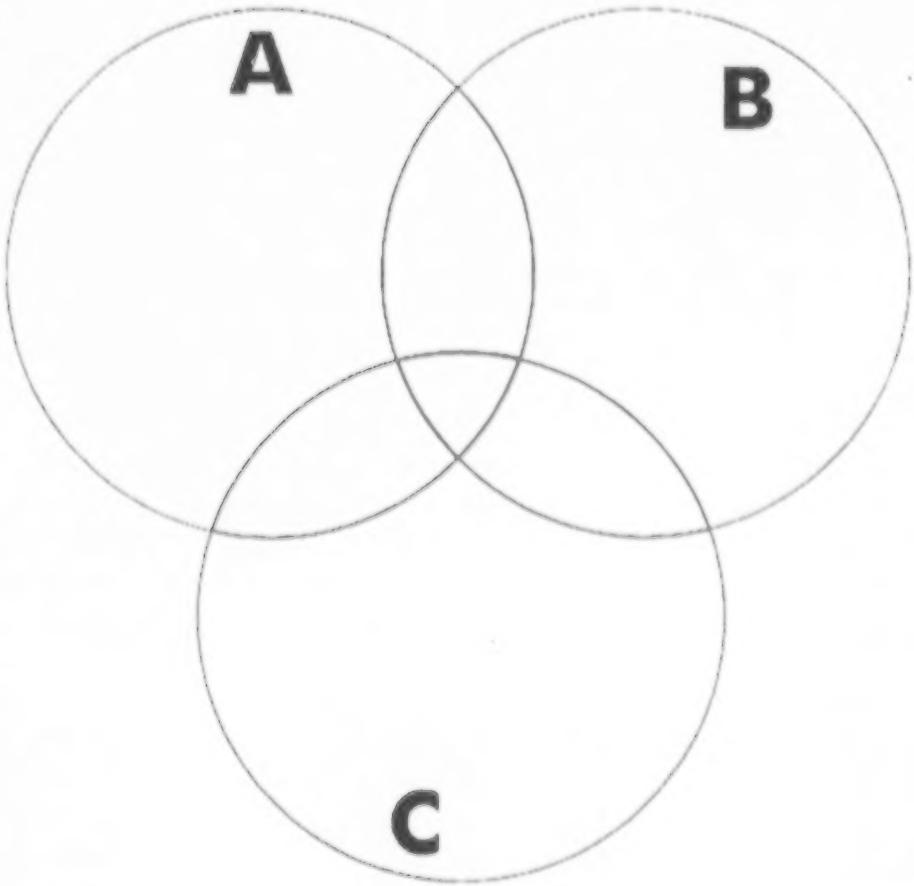
Transparency #6

Venn Diagram

Issue: _____



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